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### MURDER IN PARADISE

by Brett Halliday

*Like any Garden of Eden it had its share of  
poisonous snakes. The trail of his friend's killer  
led Mike Shayne to Hawaii, where the climate  
suddenly turned deadly! . . . . . 4*

### NOVELET

#### THE RAPE OF THE MANNEQUINS

Mel D. Ames . . . . . 38

### SHORT STORIES

#### PARANOIA

Al Nussbaum . . . . . 68

#### CARDULA AND THE BRIEFCASE

Jack Ritchie . . . . . 73

#### THE DOOM BALLOONS

Edward D. Hoch . . . . . 82

#### RANSOM

William Babula . . . . . 98

#### GOTCHA!

Jay Fox . . . . . 107

#### ANNABEL

Ruth Wissman . . . . . 116

#### FLASHBACK

Patrick Scaffetti . . . . . 120

#### HARRY HAD IT COMING!

Helene O'Shea . . . . . 125

### FEATURES

#### MYSTERY WRITERS WORD PUZZLE

Ralph Roberts . . . . . 81

#### STIFF COMPETITION (Book Reviews)

John Ball . . . . . 128

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JENKINS  
AND BOB RAFELSON  
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*The mystery of the money-filled briefcase intrigued Cardula. Here was a case he could get his teeth into!*

# Cardula and the Briefcase

by JACK RITCHIE

MY NIGHT HOURS BRING ME A GREAT MANY CLIENTS WHO, for one reason or another, dare not go to the police for help.

After I assured Alvin Atkins that anything he might tell me was utterly confidential — though I would have refused to cross my heart if he had asked me to do so — he came to the point.

“Mr. Cardula, I am a thief. And so is — or maybe was — Charley Whittle.”

I nodded to indicate that I had successfully survived his revelation.

“Charley and me are partners and been that way for about three years. I met him in Waupon and we both got paroled at about the same time.”

He hitched his chair closer. “We usually operate at around nine in the evening and mostly apartments. At that time of day, if people aren’t home, they’re probably making a night of it and shouldn’t be back for a couple of hours.”

"Well, last night we were in this apartment building on the east side — one of those posh three-story places. We let ourselves in apartment 31, which is on the top floor, and turned on the lights. It was a real classy place, big rooms, and even a cathedral-type ceiling in the living room — or maybe you'd call it the drawing room. Anyway, I grabbed an electric typewriter from the den and carried it down to the car which we had parked in the lot behind the building. I used the fire stairs and propped open the exit door so that I could get back in that way."

"Going back for more loot, I was a little surprised not to meet Charley coming down carrying something. And when I got to the apartment door again, I found that it opened only an inch because it was on the chain. So I said, 'Hey, Charley, why is the chain on the door?' But Charley doesn't come to unhook it. Instead he says real fast, 'He's got me, Al. He's got a gun and he's going to call the cops.' And then there's a thud and a groan."

"I figure what happened was that the owner of the apartment must have been somewhere in there — probably asleep — and he woke up when we let ourselves in and went looking for his gun. It was just my good luck that I happened to be downstairs when he found it."

"Well, there's nothing I can do for Charley, especially if this guy's got a gun, because I don't carry one myself. So I don't wait around to hear any more. I race down to the car and speed away fast."

"And I'm not worried about what Charley might tell the cops, because he wouldn't rat on me any more than I'd rat on him."

"The next day — which is today — I buy a newspaper to see what's being said about Charley, but there's not one word."

"Now I wouldn't expect to see anything in the papers just because a typewriter is missing, but if the police picked up Charley in somebody's apartment, that's big enough to mention, isn't it? But nothing."

He paused for a few moments of thought. "Finally I come up with the answer. When Charley gave me the warning, the apartment owner got nasty and slugged him. Probably with the gun."

"But he hit Charley *too* hard. So there he was with Charley dead and so he changed his mind about calling the cops. They might want to know why he had to hit Charley so hard when he already had him covered with a gun. He could get into a lot of trouble. Bad publicity, if nothing else. Or maybe he's got another reason. So he decides that he'll have to get rid of Charley's body himself, and that ought to be the

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end of it. He figures that if Charley disappears, his partner would be the last person to go to the police, and he's right."

"I thought about that all day and finally I decided that something had to be done about it. I was going to go to a private detective tomorrow, but when I looked in the phone book for an address I saw that you got night hours. Only. So I came right over."

It was now nearly eleven p.m.

Atkins now wound it up. "Maybe he's still got Charley's body in the apartment, maybe not. The point is that I don't want him to get away with murder if anything can be done about it."

Atkins gave me a phone number where he could be reached, a snapshot of Charley, and the address of the apartment building where Charley had disappeared.

AFTER ATKINS LEFT, I WENT RIGHT TO WORK. I DECIDED against using my car. After all, it was a balmy night with no threat of rain and a favorable tail wind. Besides, I needed the exercise.

I arrived at my destination in less than ten minutes, using my ring of special keys and picks to enter the security-conscious building. In the foyer, I found that mail box number 31 belonged to an H.C. Jefferson.

At the door of apartment 31, I listened, but did not hear any sounds, TV or otherwise. I pressed the buzzer several times and waited a full five minutes. No one came to the door.

Was H.C. Jefferson playing possum again? Would he be waiting on the other side of the door with a gun? Would he fire at me point-blank and ruin a perfectly good suit? It was a chance I had to take.

I let myself into the apartment and turned on the lights. First I made a thorough search of the apartment, including the closets, and I even looked under the bed. I found neither H.C. Jefferson nor any trace of Charley. I then searched for blood stains — a pursuit for which I have a talent — but I found none.

The telephone rang.

I let it ring five times and then succumbed to temptation. I picked up the receiver. "Yes?"

A man's voice answered. "Is this H.C. Jefferson?"

I decided to go along with that. "Yes. Who is calling?"

"Never mind. Are you missing anything?"

I gave that a moment's thought. "Maybe a typewriter?"

He chuckled. "Anything else?"

"Maybe."

"How about \$200,000 in one hundred dollar bills? When I opened that little briefcase and looked at all that money, it sort of went to my head. It even broke up a beautiful friendship."

I frowned as a suspicion formed in my mind. Was I talking to Charley Whittle? While his partner had been carrying the typewriter down to the car, had Charley found the money and decided it was too much to share with his partner? Had he quickly put the chain on the door and then put on his little act, knowing that Atkins would flee from the scene as swiftly as possible? "Why are you calling me now?"

"When I left your place I checked in at a hotel just so I'd have a place to count the money and I did. About \$200,000. I thought I'd struck it rich."

I picked up the significant word. "Thought?"

"That's right. Then I looked at that money again. More careful this time. And I see they are all *new* one hundred dollar bills. So I get to thinking. Who would leave \$200,000, just lying around like that?"

"I don't know what you mean?"

"I was going to take a plane out of town, but then I decided to stick around another day and see what's in the newspapers about \$200,000 being stolen. But there's nothing. Not one word. So I come to a conclusion. The bills are counterfeit."

I wisely said nothing.

"If I tried spending them, I'd probably get picked up. Passing counterfeit money isn't my trade. I thought that over all day, and finally I see some light. And profit. The bills mean nothing to me, but I think they mean something to you. If you didn't print them yourself, you have to buy them from somebody. And maybe they cost you?"

"Possibly."

He chuckled again. "I went back to your apartment building a little while ago and got your name off the mail box. Then I looked it up in the phone book and here I am. I could let you have the bills back for ten thousand dollars. In *real* money."

"Suppose they aren't worth that much to me?"

"Look, I'm really doing you a big favor. I could easily ship the bills to the police with a note telling them where I found the funny money. That might not be enough to pin it on you, but they'd at least be watching you for a while. And that could put a crimp on your operations."

"In other words, you're really blackmailing me?"

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"Well, that too. \$10,000 is my price. Meet me at the magazine rack in the bus station downtown at twelve noon tomorrow."

"I can't. I have a severe case of heliophobia. Suppose I meet you there in about an hour. It'll take me that long to raise the cash."

Charley thought that over and decided it would do.

AFTER HE HUNG UP, I SAT DOWN TO THINK. MY MUSINGS were interrupted by the sound of a key being used on the apartment door lock. I quickly adjourned to the shadows of the cathedral ceiling.

A few moments later, a striking young woman entered the room carrying two suitcases. She put them down and sank into a chair with the general relief of someone who has just returned from a long journey and is thankful to be home.

He hair was raven black, her skin quite arrestingly pale, and she had lustrous black eyes. Exactly my type of woman, and for a moment I even wondered if she might not actually be one of . . . . But no, I could see her image reflected quite clearly in one of the room's mirrors.

I studied the suitcases. Perhaps they explained why the robbery had not been reported to the police. H.C. Jefferson had been away on a trip. Did this mean that the money might be genuine after all?

Suddenly she frowned and sat up, staring past the open door of the den. She rose to her feet and entered the room, coming back out in a matter of moments. She had obviously discovered that her electric typewriter had been stolen.

She went directly into an adjoining bedroom. From my point of vantage, I could see her open the top drawer of a dresser. It was evident that she did not find what she was looking for. Her lips moved in a silent, emphatic oath, and she reached for the bedside phone.

Was she calling the police? I quickly descended and picked up the extension in the drawing room.

I heard the rings and then the phone was picked up and a man answered.

"Ernie," she said. "This is Helen. I just got home."

"How was the trip?"

"Pretty good. I got rid of about a hundred thousand." She paused. "Ernie, while I was gone somebody got into my apartment and stole my electric typewriter."

He sounded sympathetic. "I read someplace that one out of three households gets ripped off every year."

"The typewriter isn't the only thing missing."

"Oh?"

"I had two hundred thousand in a briefcase. That's gone too."

He sighed. "I told you not to leave that stuff lying around like that, Helen. You should keep it in a safety deposit box."

"I know. But it's too late to cry about that now. Whoever stole the bills is going to use them. He's bound to get picked up and he'll probably tell the police where he got them. What do I do now?"

"Just sit tight. If the cops talk to you, play it innocent all the way. You haven't the slightest idea what they're talking about. It's your word against his and yours should be a lot better. I suppose you'll want another batch of bills?"

"Another two hundred thousand. At the same rate?"

"Right. But don't keep them in your apartment anymore."

When she hung up, I managed to sneak down the hallway to the door and let myself out of the apartment.

I MADE MY WAY TO THE BUS DEPOT, BUT FOUND NO TRACE of Charley in the building itself. However when I traversed the area outside, I located him in a little square across the street. He sat on a bench in the shadows of a large shrub where he had a clear view of the bus terminal and its magazine rack. His right hand clutched a briefcase.

I quickly descended upon him, grasping him by the back of the neck and rendering him instantly unconscious. He would remain in that condition for approximately half an hour.

I checked the briefcase and found the counterfeit bills inside. Beside me, the limp and still unconscious Charley slid off the bench and struck his head upon the sidewalk. I immediately examined him and was relieved to find that he was not seriously injured, though a bump was beginning to form on his forehead.

I took the briefcase with me when I entered the bus station and went to a public phone. I dialed Atkins' number.

When he answered, I said, "I found Charley."

"That was quick work. Alive or dead?"

"Alive."

"What has he got to say about all of this?"

"I haven't spoken to him yet. I thought you might want to do that yourself."

"You bet. Where do I find him?"

"In the small square across the street from the downtown bus depot.

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You'll find him lying behind the bench closest to the statue of Solomon Juneau."

"What the hell is he doing there?"

"You might say he's sleeping it off."

"I'll be right there."

I WENT BACK TO THE SQUARE AND THOUGHT THE SITUATION over. What would Atkins have to say to Charley? Better yet, what would Charley have to say to Atkins? I decided not to interfere with the momentous reunion. When I saw Atkins enter the square, I faded back into the bushes where I could still see and hear.

Charley regained consciousness just as Atkins found him. He sat up and blinked. His eyes quickly searched the ground about him, but, of course, the briefcase was gone.

Atkins stared down at him. "Well?"

Charley touched his head, discovered the bump, and groaned.

Atkins tried again. "What happened?"

Charley licked his lips. "It's all coming back to me, Al. Slowly. I'm beginning to remember."

"Remember what?"

"There was this guy. In the apartment. This real *big* guy and he suddenly popped out of nowhere and pointed a gun at me. And all I could think of is warning you, my partner, which I did. And then he swings this big gun and hits me right on the head and everything goes black."

"How come the cops haven't got you?"

"Well, I wasn't unconscious for long, Al. Just a few seconds. And so when I came to, I managed to get up and escape."

"Why didn't you show up at the hotel?"

"That's just it, Al. I don't know who I am or where I am. I got amnesia. The worst kind. I don't remember nothing at all."

"Why didn't you look at your driver's license?"

"I did that, Al. But the name didn't help any and the address was Green Bay, where I now remember I got my driver's license. I was just about to catch a bus to Green Bay to see familiar things and get my memory back."

"Then what are you doing sitting here on the grass?"

Charley wrestled with that for a moment. "I suddenly got faint and passed out. I guess that's a reaction to amnesia, Al. But now I'm conscious and got my memory back."



Atkins frowned thoughtfully. "Why didn't any of this get into the papers, Charley? I mean about somebody catching you red-handed in his apartment and trying to hold you for the police?"

"Al, like I said, he was a real big guy. Two hundred and fifty pounds, at least. And I guess he was ashamed that he let somebody as little as me get away from him and decided it was better just to forget the whole thing and not get any ribbing from his friends."

Atkins looked at the sky and then finally sighed. "All right, Charley, let's see if we can find ourselves a drink."

WHEN THEY WERE GONE, I WENT BACK TO THE PUBLIC phone. I looked up H.C. Jefferson's telephone number and dialed.

When she answered, I said, "My name is Cardula. I'm a private detective. I have a client who says that he has something you lost last night. A briefcase. He's willing to return it to you. For a consideration, of course."

"Do you know what's in the briefcase?"

"He hasn't told me."

"Why does he need you at all?"

"He isn't certain what kind of a reception he might get. Therefore he has hired me as his intermediary. I'll be over in about ten minutes."

Actually, contrary to popular belief, I have a high sense of moral rectitude. I do not countenance counterfeiting or the passing of counterfeit bills.

However I thought that by meeting Helen C. Jefferson personally, and fairly often, I might be able to lead her from her path of crime.

It was certainly worth a try. ●

## MYSTERY MINQUIZ

What fictional private detective was portrayed by actors Lloyd Nolan, Hugh Beaumont, and Jeff Chandler?

*Mike Shayne*

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